DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 272 872 CS 209 887

AUTHOR Pearson, Ronald A.
TITLE The Ideal Public Relations Situation: Alternative Criteria for Program Evaluation.
PUB DATE 5 Aug 86
NOTE 23p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (69th, Norman, OK, August 3-6, 1986).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Information Analyses (070) -- Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Communication Research; Communication Skills; *Evaluation Methods; Information Theory; Literature Reviews; Organizational Communication; Persuasive Discourse; *Program Evaluation; *Public Relations; *Rhetoric
IDENTIFIERS Corporations

ABSTRACT

The analysis presented in this paper is based on the premise that study of public relations from the perspective of a rhetorical theory yields useful insights about public relations. The first part of the paper develops a rationale for the study of the rhetoric of organizations, especially the rhetoric of corporations, and concludes by juxtaposing the work of a theorist interested in public affairs management with the views of a rhetorical theorist. The second part of the paper reviews relevant literature in public relations with emphasis on (1) themes in the work of James Grunig, Todd Hunt, and William Ehling, and on (2) the current importance of the idea of measurability in public relations. The final section of the paper links the themes in public relations literature with the critical theory of Jurgen Habermas, which results in the development of criteria for critically evaluating public relations programming. (DF)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED272872

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

The ideal public relations situation: Alternative criteria for program evaluation

Ronald A. Pearson
School of Interpersonal Communication
Kantner Hall
Ohio University
Athens, OH 45701

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Ronald Pearson

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CS 209887

Paper presented to the Public Relations Division, annual convention, Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Norman, OK, August 5, 1986.

The analysis in this paper is the product of an interest in public relations theory, rhetorical theory and critical theory. It is based on the premise that study of public relations from the perspective of a rhetorical theory informed by critical theory yields useful insights about public relations. It is believed these insights offer an alternative perspective to that afforded by the current emphasis in public relations on management by objective techniques and effects measurement. More specifically, an approach to public relations from the perspective of rhetorical and critical theory can provide public relations with useful, alternative criteria for evaluating and critiquing public relations and public affairs programming. These criteria can be developed from ideas explicit in critical theory and implicit in some current public relations theory. The overall purpose of this paper is to show why these criteria are needed, how they can be generated, and how they can be useful.

The first part of the paper develops a rationale for the study of the rhetoric of organizations, especially the rhetoric of corporations. This rationale, which begins with Galbraith's analysis of the relationship between power and persuasion, concludes by juxtaposing the work of a theorist interested in public affairs management with the views of a rhetorical theorist. This juxtaposition is symbolic of what the paper wants ultimately to accomplish and effects a transition into discussion of the specific research questions addressed. The second part of the paper reviews relevant literature in public relations with emphasis on 1) themes in the work of James Grunig, Todd Hunt and William Ehling and 2) the current importance of the idea of measurability in public relations. The final section of the paper builds on theory explicated as a result of this review and links it with the critical theory of Jürgen Habermas. The result is a marriage between the public relations theories of Grunig, Hunt and Ehling and the communication theory of Habermas,

a combination which yields criteria for making critical evaluations of public relations programming.

Section I

The rationale: persuasion, power and interdependence

Galbraith (1983) has suggested the exercise of power in advanced capitalist economies is uniquely characterized along two dimensions: the source from which power is derived and the instruments by which it is exercised. He argues power is no longer a function of personality or wealth, but rather of organization. Moreover, the instruments of power are no longer the ability to threaten punishment or promise reward, but the ability to persuade. Galbraith's argument traces the relationships among these variables to show the historical connection between personality and the ability to impose punishment, and between wealth and the ability to purchase submission. In advanced economies, the primary association is between organization as a source of power and persuasion as the instrument of power.

For Galbraith, the real world is one populated by great interacting organizations. As manifestations of this age of organization, Galbraith lists the modern management-controlled corporation, the trade union, the modern bureaucratic state, groups of farmers and oil producers working with government, trade associations, and lobbies. He describes a world in which public policy is only marginally affected by the individual citizen voter or congressperson. Instead, large organizations engage in efforts to influence one another and, ultimately, public policy. The primary tools these organizations use to advance their interests are rhetorical.

With this sense of the political landscape, Gollner's views on the the character of inter-organizational relationships can be developed. Gollner (1983) talks about the

'crowding in' of external issues on organizational decision-making and the growth of both institutional interdependence and paralysis. He writes:

> During the past twenty years, interactions among government, business, labour and other sectors have become increasingly frequent and close range. But rather than enhancing our ability to act, growing interdependence has produced greater adversity and frequent paralysis among our key institutions. The Achilles' heel of our current political-economic system is the inability to manage the dynamics of interdependence (p. 1).

Galbraith's world of large interacting organizations, according to Gollner, is shrinking. The giants cannot avoid rubbing shoulders with one another or with smaller groups of organized interests; and they have not been prepared for it. The solution Gollner recommends includes many rhetorical strategies. Organizations must develop deeper understanding of their environments and learn when to adapt to outside pressures as well as when to make efforts to influence those pressures. Using the language of systems theory, Gollner talks about both control of the environment and adaptation to it. He parallels Galbraith in suggesting it is the rhetorical use of symbols whereby this adaptation and control is achieved. Although Gollner does not use this language, it may well be appropriate to speak of a rhetoric of adaptation and control; Gollner's own nomenclature is the language of public affairs management.

A planned and rigorously managed rhetorical response to the environment on the part of corporations and other institutions is a phenomenon that is less than two decades old, if we take as an indicator the establishment of public affairs departments in large corporations. Almost 60 per cent of all public affairs offices at the time of a 1981 survey by the Public Affairs Research Group were created during the 1970s. Nearly one third of all public affairs offices were created during the five years between 1975 and 1980 (Buchholz, 1985).

As corporations established public affairs departments, they became increasingly involved in rhetorical activity. A general, and current, description of the task of public affairs departments is that they manage issues. By issue is meant what Bitzer (1968) called the nucleus of the rhetorical situation--exigence. "Rhetorical situation may be definied as a complex of persons, events, objects, and relations presenting an actual or potential exigence which can be completely removed if discourse, introduced into the situation, can so constrain human decision or action as to bring about the significant modification of the the exigence. . . . (A)n exigence which can be modified only by means other than discourse is not rhetorical" (p. 5). To make this characterization specific to public relations, a reader might think of 'the public relations situation' and 'the management of institutional or organizational exigencies;' in place of the word discourse, one can substitute any or all of the communication strategies common to public relations practice. The main point is that corporations and other organizations have only recently begun managing these issues or exigencies as if they were indeed rhetorical, as if their solutions involved communication (discourse) as an activity to achieve communication effects such as awareness, agreement, mutual understanding or behavioral change.

Research questions: Quest for evaluation criteria

The world of politics and public policy is a world of organizations which are turning increasingly to rhetorical strategies as a way of dealing with problems of inter-organizational conflict and interdependence. Corporate rhetoric is the planned and purposeful use of symbols by a corporation to influence public policy outcomes. In major corporations, rhetorical strategy is the product of highly trained groups of communication professionals usually associated with public affairs or public relations departments. They conduct in depth analysis of the policy environment, identify problems and opportunities which call for rhetorical strategies, set objectives, plan and manage communication

programs, and evaluate results. The whole process is, ideally, meticulously thought out and carefully managed. Moreover, the critical methods used by managers to justify and evaluate communication programs are becoming increasingly scientific. But there may be some risk to this new emphasis. If public affairs managers focus too much on measuring results, they may neglect the question whether those results are worth achieving at all. This point is made by Bitzer (1971) in the report of the National Development Project on Rhetoric.

Bitzer argues that rhetoricians, who have traditionally been interested in the persuasive speeches of politicians and preachers, should examine the way in which institutions and organizations communicate, and he raises questions about what criteria should be applied to this kind of study. He rejects as the key criterion the measure of the efficiency of the communication campaign or communication system. "There are other important considerations: Was the information worth retaining? Were the beliefs and arguments sound? Was the outcome good? Rhetoric as an instrument of technology would not have to consider such questions, but rhetoric as a humane discipline. . .must consider the moral, aesthetic, and civilizing aspects of communication. Critical grounds, in this case, will lie elsewhere than in the easy principle of efficiency (p. 206)."

Bitzer's ideas get to the heart of the research questions this paper addresses. What are the criteria appropriate for making judgments about corporate rhetoric, about corporate public affairs programming? What criteria address those questions Bitzer believes are neglected? In what principle shall they be grounded if not in the principle of efficiency? The following section begins developing an answer to the last question; the final section finishes that task and tackles the first two questions as well.

Section II

An emerging paradigm

The following analysis focuses on current literature in public relations to

show the favored paradigm emerging in public relations theory. Key implications of this paradigm are drawn out by an examination of the work of two leading public relations theorists. The paradigm favored by many current theorists has its roots in general systems theory. The first task is to indicate how widespread this debt to systems theory is, the second to outline the effect this perspective has had on current public relations thinking. The thesis that guides the analysis is that in current public relations theory there are clues that could direct theorists in their efforts to develop a methodology for the evaluation and critical examination of public relations and public affairs programming which would meet Bitzer's requirements.

The sixth edition of a popular public relations text (Cutlip, Center & Broom, 1985) has added a new chapter which advances a systems perspective as a theoretical model for public relations. Grunig and Hunt (1984), writing what they call the most theoretical book yet written about public relations, use a systems approach to conceptualize the role of public relations in an organization. Nager and Allen (1984), the first theorists to build a public relations management text on management by objective principles, also favor a systems approach. Gollner (1983) uses systems theoretic concepts to describe organizational interdependence. The references of Wolter and Miles (1983) to 'an ecological state of mind' and 'mutual management' align them with what is emerging as the dominant paradigm in public relations. And while Ehling (1984, 1985) does not explicate the role of systems theory in his work, his acknowledged debt to Ackoff and Emery (1972) place him unmistakably in the mainstream.

The adoption of systems theory as a theoretical model for public relations has profound implications for the discipline. A systems view of the world sees not a universe of self-sufficient atomic parts but one of mutually dependent and interconnected parts. The systems view is an holistic view in which the whole is more than the sum of its parts. Indeed, those parts can be isolated for anlaysis only by risking the broader perspective.

Two kinds of systems are distinguished--closed and open systems. A closed system is independent of its environment. It imports neither information nor energy and, as a result, succumbs to the tyranny of the second law of thermodynamics--it moves toward maximum disorder. In contrast, social systems, including organizations, are open systems which are not independent of their environments.

Adoption of a systems perspective by public relations is explicit recognition of the fundamental character of interdependence among organizations. Traditional organizational theorists took the environment for granted and managed as if their organizations were closed. This perspective is rarely appropriate today. The view that organizations must manage interdependence (Gollner, 1983; Wolter & Miles, 1983) has replaced it. Public relations personnel are viewed as working at the boundaries of the systems they represent (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). Borrowing some of the technical language of systems science, it can be said that public relations departments, by importing information into the system, play a negentropic role--they work to thwart the second law of thermodynamics and thereby help maintain, and increase, order in the organization.

Grunig and Hunt: Symmetrical communication

A systems theoretic view of organizational interdependence is implied in the public relations models developed by Grunig and Hunt (1984, p. 22). Distinguised are four models--the press agentry/publicity model, the public information model, the two-way asymmetric model, and the two-way symmetric model. The models differ on a number of important dimensions, including purpose, type of communication, and type of communication model implied.

Of interest is the way these dimensions change from model to model, for the change implies a move toward a systems perspective. Press agentry typically implies a one-way communication model and seeks to achieve a propagandistic purpose; the public

information model likewise implies a one-way model, its purpose the dissemination of information. The two-way asymmetric model relies on feedback to control its environment to achieve scientific persuasion. The two-way symmetric model has as its purpose mutual understanding, and seeks to achieve balanced (symmetrical) communication effects using a two-way communication system which envisions source and receiver replaced by participants who cannot be distinguished in the process as source or receiver.

Grunig and Hunt advocate a contingency theory of public relations management which contends that managers should choose the model most appropriate for a given organization in a given environment. On the other hand, there is no doubt that the four part model described above is more than a typology of management options. The model is also prescriptive. This is acknowledged unequivocally in the preface where a preference is stated for the two-way symmetric model with its goal of mutual understanding and its methods of negotiation and compromise. This idea of symmetry as a normative value in communication is central to Grunig's and Hunt's theory of public relations and to their notion of public responsibility. It is a value that acknowledges the idea of mutual dependency, the central philosophical idea of systems theory.

Ehling's communication-as-conversation

Ehling's public relations theory (1984, 1985) is grounded in decision theory and develops a complex set of inter-connected concepts. He uses decision theory and mathematical notation to define and formulize, generically, the nature of a problem, choice situation, purposeful state, information, message, communication, cooperation and conflict. He then uses these concepts to develop a theory of public relations management. The theory defines a public relations setting, a public relations situation, a public relations problem state, public relations management, and public relations activity.

Ehling's theory has too many propositions to sample many of them here, but

key ingredients of it are especially salient. For Ehling (and for Bitzer as well), a public relations problem cannot exist unless communication is a possible course of action for resolution of inter-organizational conflict. Similarly, Grunig and Hunt define a public relations problem as the absence of communication or a communication effect desired by an organization. Ehling also contrasts message dissemination with message exchange, calling the latter 'communication-as-conversation'.

Ehlinh maintains that the scope of a public relations problem qua public relations is limited by three conditions. One is that the communication system implemented as the solution or as a means to that end must be a two-way message exchange system. Ehling does not emphasize symmetry in the same way that Grunig and Hunt do--as a communication system where source and receiver are indistinguishable. At least he does not make such a notion explicit. On the other hand, his use of the phrase 'communication-as-conversation' is suggestive since it is usually in the dialogue of a conversation that communicators experience a sense that they are source and receiver simultaneously. As a result, it is possible to argue that a concept very similar to Grunig's symmetry is playing a central role in Ehling's theory.

The second condition limiting what can be taken as a bone fide public relations problem is that the communcation system has sufficient longevity to maximize inter-organizational cooperation. It is the third condition, however, that is the most interesting, for it makes Ehling's theory unique. He stipulates that one of the features of communication-as-conversation is that the parties involved in the process must be able to carry on a dialogue about the communication process itself. He calls this meta-communication 'reflectiveness'. Reflectiveness is a key concept, for it makes possible the third condition limiting a public relations problem. Ehling describes the condition this way: "The design and implementation of. . .the communication system is a joint venture involving responsible decision makers from both the focal organization and

the other social grouping with which the focal group is in actual or potential conflict" (p. 18). Ehling, like Grunig and Hunt, places a high value on symmetry in the inter-organizational communication process, but he also introduces the idea that this symmetry has to exist at more than one level.

The paradox of measurability

The analysis so far has helped identify the systems perspective which is emerging in public relations theory. It has been noted, by looking in some detail at the work of leading theorists, how this world view has implications for the theory developed in its name. Of special interest has been Grunig's and Hunt's notion of two-way symmetry, Ehling's idea of reflectiveness and the three conditions which Ehling deduces from his idea of communication-as-conversation. Having noted these important themes, it is necessary to clarify that they are not only new in public relations, but radical as well. Historically, public relations has cared little for the receiver beyond that receiver's role as a mediating variable between some problem state--lack of a specified communication effect--and its solution. Sullivan's (1965) idea of partisan values in public relations describes what a typical practitioner's highest values might be. Indeed, Grunig and Hunt point out only 15 per cent of organizations practice two-way symmetric public relations. To balance this view of public relations offered by Grunig, Hunt and Ehling, another major theme in current public relations literature must be examined--the drive toward more respectibility and effectiveness in public relations by the adoption of social scientific method. Indeed, Grunig, Hunt and Ehling are also advocates of this emphasis.

Bernays (1952) was perhaps the first to exhort practitioners to adopt social scientific methods. Robinson (1966) also made it clear he envisioned the practitioner as an applied social scientist. Nager and Allen (1984) chronicle the current trend toward measurability and evaluation in public relations. They write: "Under PR-MBO [public relations management by objectives], public relations professionals strive to make all

their objectives measurable. Most of these objectives can be quantified, and some may be measured in terms of quality too" (p. 174). Marzano (1984) suggests virtually anything in business, including public relations, can be measured.

The trend toward evaluation and measurement has been forced on public relations by economic conditions and can be explained largely as the profession's response to the demand for increased accountability. Moreover, the trend has been good for public relations and has compelled the profession to give up the notion that what it achieved was intangible and nebulous. It must be noted, however, that framing specific, achievable and measurable objectives forces a practitioner to view the world in a way that is quite at odds with the emerging systems approach in public relations. The holistic world of systems theory is not susceptible of the kind of analysis that reveals measurable results. For instance, to distinguish between source and receiver in a communication situation--a necessary step for a researcher interested in the impact of a message--is to engage in a process of analysis that draws a communicator back into an asymmetrical mode of communication. For as soon as a communicator's partner in communication is envisioned as the 'receiver' of messages, the spell is broken, symmetry is lost. This suggests a tension exists in current public relations theorizing between what are two fundamentally different ways of thinking about the discipline, for it appears modes of analysis which isolate variables for study are a threat to the kind of symmetry and conversation Grunig, Hunt and Ehling write about.

Notwithstanding the arguments of Grunig and Hunt (1984) and Broom (1977) that mutual understanding is an important and sometimes measurable goal of public relations, most practicing professionals are looking for overt behavior as a result of their communications programming. This is implied in the current emphasis on the public policy arena as the place where corporate rhetoric is engaged (Buchholz, 1985; Crable & Vibert, 1985; Gollner, 1983; Jones & Chase, 1977; Tombari, 1984). Jones

and Chase, often credited as the progenitors of the idea of issues management, make it clear that the goal of public affairs programming is public, and ultimately legislator, support for corporate policy positions. In reaffirming the value of the Jones/Chase model, Crable and Vibbert (1985) characterize the goals of public affairs as public policy change in any of its ramifications: new laws, new government guidelines, new regulatory concepts, even new administrative practices or interpretations (p. 12). All of these goals, while often presupposing mutual understanding, go beyond it to posit measurable, overt behavior as the objective of corporate rhetoric. The process of analysis which posits or measures discrete behaviors as goals or results also implies an asymmetrical communication relationship; it precludes an holistic world view and requires a clear distinction between source and receiver.

The preceding analysis has revealed that systems theory appears to be the basis of the emerging paradigm or world view in public relations. It has also been suggested that Grunig's concept of two-way symmetrical communication and Ehling's concept of communication-as-conversation, along with the notion of reflectiveness, are important, though perhaps radical, ideas in public relations. The analysis also revealed a source of tension within public relations theory between thinking which emphasizes symmetry and the idea of 'conversation' and thinking which emphasizes scientific methodologies and effects measurement. The following section explores this tension in more detail and links the themes identified in the public relations literature with the communication theory of Habermas.

Section III

Public relations and the principle of efficiency

When Bitzer (1971) raised the question of what criteria are appropriate for the critique of the technology, messages, campaigns and communications systems of institutional rhetoric, he suggested these criteria were not to be found in the principle of

efficiency, in the questions of whether the message or campaign worked. This section suggests first that the principle of efficiency is central to the way most contemporary public relations is evaluated. Second, it is suggested the principle of efficiency is wanting on both logical and ideological grounds as long as it remains unaccompanied by other forms of program critique. Third, the tension in public relations theory is analysed in terms of Habermas' distinction between instrumental and communicative rationality. And fourth, the marriage of Grunig, Ehling, and Habermas is developed to provide criteria that can be used along with social scientific evaluation methods to evaluate public affairs programming.

Cutlip, Center, and Broom (1985) assert no topic currently dominates public relations as does program evaluation, the systematic measure of program efficiency and effectiveness. The key concern is with the outcome or impact of communication programming: how many audience members have changed their attitudes or behaved in the desired fashion? Evaluation is not only concerned with impact assessment, however, but with the efficiency of the overall public relations process as well. Typically, practitioners view this process as reducible to four stages: 1) problem recognition and definition, 2) objective setting and program planning, 3) communication, and 4) evaluation. Process evaluation examines elements in all four stages: was initial research adequate? were messages accurate and timely? what was the ratio of messages sent to messages placed in target media?

Specific measures of both process and outcome efficiency are numerous. The central criteria against which outcomes are evaluated are program purposes and objectives. Yet these purposes are not automatically evaluated as part of the ongoing evaluation process and, as a result, outcome evaluation risks begging ideological questions about the legitimacy and worth of program goals. Unasked as a necessary part of evaluation is the question: is the world implied in program objectives any better than the

one we have now? As well, the evaluative questions about process elements use language and values identical to those used within the process. For instance, questions about the accuracy and objectivity of messages invoke the same values of objectivity and accuracy as were operative during message production. Discussion about the concept of objectivity would not regularly take place. In other words, the categories of the public relations production process are used over again to provide critical categories for evaluation. When public relations evaluates itself in this way, it risks the logical error of circular reasoning.

Grunig and Hunt (1984) do not wholly escape this tendency to use the categories of the public relations production process as categories of evalutation. On the one hand, Grunig and Hunt do suggest that evaluation of public relations can include questions about the congruence (symmetry) of organizational/public cognitions and evaluations but left unarticulated are the conditions that would bring about symmetry. Overall, the work of Grunig and Hunt, while revealing the key to a critical methodology in the idea of symmetry, does not integrate the notion as a necessary component of the public relations production and evaluation processes. In fact, it would be difficult for the authors to do this and maintain their contingency view of public relations management.

Ehling (1984, 1985) does not use the language of symmetry preferred by Grunig and Hunt. But he insists public relations must involve message exchange as opposed to message dissemination and uses the term communication-as-conversation to designate this relationship. However, Ehling adds a dimension to his model which suggests a way of escaping the circularity inherent in some modes of evaluation. This dimension, reflectiveness, allows communicators to talk about the communication process itself. Thus, this critical question can be asked: is the communication system linking organization and public a mutually agreed-to and co-sponsored system? In other words, communicators must be able to ask questions about the formal, structural properties of

the system linking them. Ehling's idea of reflectiveness begins to unpack Grunig's and Hunt's idea of symmetry by suggesting at least one criteria for evaluating it: the amount of mutual support for and the quality of dialogue about the communication system linking organization and public. Habermas' theory provides other criteria.

Habermas, rationality and the ideal public relations situation

Habermas (1970, 1984) develops a complex theory of communication which explains how rational communication and intersubjective understanding is possible at both an interpersonal and societal level. Two aspects of Habermas' thought are relevant in this context--his distinction between instrumental reason and communicative reason and his articulation of the ideal communication situation in which undistorted interpersonal or public communication takes place. The first of these themes points backwards to a concern raised already regarding the apparent tension in public relations theory between the ideas of symmetry and reflectiveness and the current emphasis on measurable results. The second theme is directly connected with the question of criteria for public relations program evaluation.

Habermas (1984) distinguishes two fundamentally different kinds of rationality. One he calls 'cognitive instrumental rationality.' This kind of reason, says Habermas, has, as a result of empiricism, marked deeply the way in which the modern era understands itself. It's goal is 'instrumental mastery.' "On this model rational actions basically have the character of goal-directed, feedback-controlled interventions in the world of existing states of affairs" (p. 11). This is the kind of rationality favored by a scientific approach to public relations.

The second type of reason Habermas calls communicative rationality, a concept which carries with it, " connotations based ultimately on the central experience of the unconstrained, unifying, consensus-bringing force of argumentative speech" (p. 10). This view, according to Habermas, takes a phenomenological approach which the first view

of reason, which Habermas calls the 'realistic' view, does not take. The realistic view starts from the assumption that the world exists while the latter view, "gives a phenomenological twist to the question and reflects on the fact that those who behave rationally must themselves presuppose an objective world" (p. 11). Instead of embarking on problem solving action in a world that is presupposed, according to Habermas, the phenomenologist asks how this world is constituted; he or she wonders how it is even possible for instrumental reason to identify problems, set goals for itself, implement strategies and monitor results. For Habermas, that world is constituted through intersubjective, communicative action. Presupposed by one-way, monological (instrumental) rationality is two-way, dialogical (communicative) rationality.

Habermas' distinction between monological and dialogical rationality articlulates the tension referred to earlier between the two approaches to public relations theory. Emphasis on social scientific methodologies belies an instrumental rationality while emphasis on symmetry, conversation and mutual understanding implies a communicative rationality. Indeed, Habermas' distinction parallels distinctions implicit in Grunig's and Hunt's four-part typology of public relations models. Only the two-way symmetric model is a dialogical model. And according to Habermas, it is presupposed by the other models, all of which are examples of instrumental, monological rationality.

What Grunig and Hunt call scientific persuasion is the apex of instrumental rationality. Habermas is concerned to articulate an alternative kind of rationality that would act as a bulwark against the hegonomy of merely efficient technique. Like other critical theorists, he is worried about the dehumanizing effects wrought by instrumental reason, of the specter of life administered according to a monological rationality. For this reason he would be concerned about the allegience between public relations theory and social scientific technique; he would be concerned that this allegience would lead to the flourishing of two-way asymmetric public relations at the expense of two-way

symmetrical public relations.

The second aspect of Habermas' theory relevant to this paper is his articulation of the conditions for an ideal communication situation in which undistorted (dialogical) interpersonal or public communication can take place. While acknowledging this ideal is not empirically achievable, Habermas suggests rational discourse unavoidably posits or 'anticipates' the ideal as a precondition for such discourse; as noted above, Habermas holds dialogic rationality is presupposed by instrumental reason. McGuire (1977) suggests this anticipated ideal can function as a critical standard.

Habermas' (1970) formulation of the ideal communication situation is this: "...when there is complete symmetry in the distribution of assertion and dispute, revelation and concealment, prescription and conformity, among the partners of communication... communication will not be hindered by constraints arising from its own structure" (p. 371). Symmetry, as in Grunig, Hunt and Ehling, is the general requirement for the ideal. By combining ideas from Habermas and two of his interpreters (Burleson & Kline, 1979) it is possible to be specific about the requirements for symmetry. The following propositions are developed:

1) communicants must have equal opportunity to begin discourse and to maintain it.

2) communicants must feel equally at ease regarding self-disclosure. Habermas refers to a mutuality of unimpaired self-presentation.

3) communicants must have equal opportunity to advance assertions and challenge others so that no views go unchallenged.

4) interaction must be free of manipulation and domination.

5) communicants must be equal in terms of power.

The first three requirements of symmetry suggest the following normative propositions for public relations:

1) spokespersons from either the organization or its publics must have equal opportunity to make contact with one another.

2) a mechanism must exist for addressing felt problems of inequality as outlined in proposition # 1. This would be a mechanism for making possible what Ehling calls reflectiveness.

3) spokespersons must be able to maintain open communication channels for as long as necessary or until there is mutual agreement to terminate communication.

4) spokespersons must have the expectation that they will speak to the same person or persons in the other organization as long as a particular issue is under discussion.

5) opposing points of view about the same issue must not be left unresolved as the end state of communication. This fifth norm is suggested by Bennett (1985).

A communcation system linking organizations and publics which conformed to norms like those described here would go a long way toward ameliorating problems arising from asymmetries of power. Lessened as well, would be the ability of either the organization or its publics to manipulate or control the communication situation. A suggestion to address the fourth and fifth requirments of symmetry might look like this:

6) Both organizations and publics must have access to similar quantity and quality of communication resources.

Conclusion

No pretense exists that the norms suggested above are exhaustive. But it is believed that the use of these norms, or similar norms, to evaluate corporate rhetoric would yield valuable critical insights; the norms furnish criteria for a critical methodology for evaluating public relations and public affairs programming. The criteria are not grounded in the principle of efficiency, but in the often inefficient principle of communication symmetry articulated in the contemporary public relations theory of

Grunig, Hunt and Ehling and in the communication theory of Habermas. As a result, they address issues of public relations program critique left unaddressed by criteria grounded in the principle of efficiency, in the kind of rationality Habermas calls monological or instrumental. These criteria would seem to meet the requirements suggested by Bitzer.

It can also be said that the criteria are grounded in a systems approach to public relations management in that the mutual interdependence of systems described by systems theory can be taken as a ground for the normative value of communication symmetry. Moreover, the norms are genuinely useful for the critique of public relations because of their transcendent character--the questions of symmetry are asked from *outside* the normal activities of the public relations production and evaluation processes; they are asked from the vantage point of Ehling's reflectiveness. Another point worth noting is that the norms deal with the formal, structural properties of communication in public relations. Symmetry is a structural attribute. As a result, legitimate communication results--the end state of a public relations communication transaction--are not dependent on the absolute rightness or wrongness of the views injected into the transaction, but rather on the quality of consensus achieved by the transaction. The quality of that consensus, of course, depends on whether norms like those described here were operative. A complete methodology for corporate rhetoric requires an exhaustive taxonomy of the structural components that legitimize inter-organizational communication systems. This taxonomy could even include reference to language structures which affect the quality of that communication (Bennett, 1985).

It should also be noted that the norms developed above are meant to have practical value. A practitioner can apply them and compare performance with them. Part of program evaluation would include questions about whether programs fulfilled normative requirements. Here, of course, a practitioner would rarely expect to find his or her program measuring up perfectly, but would distinguish between an 'ideal public

relations transaction' as a critical ideal and as a real empirical possibility. Even Habermas ruled out the latter. It should be remembered, however, that the practical value of applying the kind of critical norms described here is not linked to increased program effectiveness in the sense of more efficient or more certain achievement of measurable communication effects. But an organization which sets, as an objective of public relations practice, the establishment and maintenance of symmetrical communication relationships would find the norms of practical use. Once communication symmetry is established as a program objective along with other objectives, public relations management would discover the practical utility of the norms in the way the normative value of symmetry can be operationalized in clear-cut standards for communication practice.

References

Ackoff, R. L. & Emery, F. E. (1972). On purposeful systems. New York: Aldine-Atherton.

Bennett, L. W. (1985). Communication and social responsibility. Quarterly Journal of Speech, 71, 259-288.

Bernays. E. L. (1952). Public relations. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.

Bitzer, L. F. (1968). The rhetorical situation. Philosophy and Rhetoric, 1, 1-14.

Bitzer, L. F. (1971). More reflections on the Wingspread Conference. In L. Bitzer and E. Black (Eds.), The prospect of rhetoric (pp. 200-207). Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

Broom, G. M. (1977). Coorientational measurement of public issues. Public Relations Review, 3(1), 110-119.

Buchholz, R. A. (1985). Essentials of public policy for management. Englewood CLiffs: Prentice Hall, Inc.

Burleson, B. R. & Kline, S. L. (1979). Habermas' theory of communication: A critical explication. Quarterly Journal of Speech, 65, 412-428.

Crable, R. E. & Vibbert, S. L. (1985). Managing issues and influencing public policy. Public Relations Review, 11(2), 3-16.

Cutlip, R. E., Center, A. H. & Broom, G. M. (1985). Effective public relations. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, Inc.

Ehling, W. P. (1984). Application of decision theory in the construction of a theory of public relations I. Public Relations Research and Education, 1(2), 25-37.

Ehling, W. P. (1985). Application of decision theory in the construction of a theory of public relations II. Public Relations Research and Education, 2(1), 4-22.

Galbraith, J. K. (1983). The anatomy of power. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Gollner, A. B. (1983). Social change and corporate strategy: The expanding role of public affairs. Stamford: Issue Action Press.

Grunig, J. E. & Hunt, T. (1984). Managing public relations. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Habermas, J. (1970). Towards a theory of communicative competence. Inquiry, 13, 360-375.

Habermas, J. (1984). The theory of communicative action Vol. I. (T. McCarthy, Trans.). Boston: Beacon Press. (Original work published 1981)

Jones, B. L. & Chase, H. W. (1979). Managing public policy issues. Public Relations Review, 5(3), 3-23.

Marzano, R. (1984). Evaluating. In C. Burger (Ed.), Experts in action: Inside public relations. (pp. 339-362). New York: Longman.

McGuire, R. R. (1977). Speech acts, communicative competence and the paradox of authority. Philosophy and Rhetoric, 10(1), 30-45.

Nager, N. R. & Allen, T. H. (1984). Public relations management by objectives. New York: Longman.

Robinson, E. J. (1966). Communication and public relations. Columbus: Charles E. Merrill.

Sullivan, A. J. (1965). Values of public relations. In O. Lerbinger & A. J. Sullivan (Eds.), Information, influence and communication (pp. 412-439). New York: Basic Books, Inc.

Tombari, H. A. (1984). Business and society: Strategies for the environment and public policy. New York: The Dryden Press.

Wolter, L. J. & Miles, S. B. (1983). Toward public relations theory. Public Relations Journal, 39(9), 13-16.